

VZCZCXRO6783
PP RUEHDBU
DE RUEHNT #0965 1360920
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 160920Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7852
INFO RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 3032
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA 9160
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1164
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 3636
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 3500
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 1870
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 7068
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0119
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 1994
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0771

C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 000965

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN, DRL, AND PRM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/16/2017

TAGS: [PREF PHUM PREL AF UZ](#)

SUBJECT: UNDP: REPORTS OF HARASSMENT OF AFGHAN REFUGEES
CEASE

REF: TASHKENT 459

Classified By: CDA Brad Hanson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: UN Development Program (UNDP) Resident Representative told Charge on May 8 that the Government has ceased harassment of Afghan refugees. Several cases of harassment had been reported, particularly in the first part of this year. In March, the Foreign Ministry notified UNDP that mandate refugee certificates do not provide a legal basis for long-term residence, and that refugees must apply for visas (ref A). In response, the UNDP requested Uzbek visas for the remaining refugees and requested that the Government waive the associated application and monthly registration fees. Reports of harassment ended shortly thereafter. The change in attitude may be related to the fact that most remaining refugees are now being processed for resettlement. End summary.

¶2. (C) UN Development Program (UNDP) Resident Representative Fikret Akcura told Charge on May 8 that Uzbek police have stopped harassing Afghan refugees. He cited the fact that UNDP has received no recent reports of refugees being stopped for document checks or detained. On March 6, the Foreign Ministry notified UNDP that refugees must obtain Uzbek visas, as UN-issued refugee certificates did not provide a legal basis for long-term residence in Uzbekistan (ref A). UNDP, in turn, replied that it would assist Afghan refugees in applying for Uzbek visas, if the GOU waived the associated application fees and monthly registration fees. According to Akcura, while the Government has not formally replied, reported harassment of refugees ceased shortly after UNDP's request.

¶3. (C) Since January, there have been several reports of Afghan refugees being harassed by police, especially in the southern border town of Termez. In at least a dozen instances, police detained refugees, checked them for residence documents, and tore up their refugee certificates, saying that they were meaningless. In all such cases, according to Akcura, police released the refugees with a warning that they must apply for a visa. In four cases, refugees were repatriated to Afghanistan, though two of them later returned to Uzbekistan (reftel).

¶4. (C) Akcura speculated that the GOU ceased its harassment

of refugees because most of those remaining are now being processed for resettlement in the United States and Canada. (Note: Approximately 1,400 refugees remain in Uzbekistan, mostly from Afghanistan. The Embassy is assisting in processing approximately 700 cases, 191 of which have been accepted. End note.) Akcura earlier suggested that the Government's decision to require visas for the refugees might have been motivated by its desire to raise funds, as the total cost of visa applications and monthly registration fees could have exceeded \$500,000 per year.

15. (C) Comment: The exact motive behind the Government's apparent change in policy towards Afghan refugees is unclear. It is quite possible, however, that the earlier harassment and the Government's ultimatum to UNDP were part of an effort to speed the resettlement process.
HANSON